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THE LABOUR ORGANISER

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ALPHA

The object of this little Journal is the fulfilment in part of the prime object for which the National Association of Labour Registration and Election Agents exists, viz., "the advancement of the Labour Cause, with special reference to the improvement of the Party's political machinery." The need of some medium of exchange for ideas on organisation, and some open platform on which they may be discussed, has long been seen. That it is sought to satisfy the want on the principle of self-help calls for neither apology nor explanation. It is characteristic of the Party, where so much must needs depend on the sacrifice, the energy, and the initiative of its members. The life of *The Labour Organiser* may be long or short, according as its usefulness is maintained and appreciated, but so long as Labour remains a concrete and living force in the life of the nation, so long must its organising machinery be matter for study and discussion, and means be found for reflection and expression thereon. In the expectation and hope of a long life and a lusty growth we commend our infant paper to your notice, and call on you to watch and help it grow.

OUR PROBLEM

The Labour Organiser has a vastly different problem from that of the Liberal or Tory Agent. The Labour Movement is complex. Liberal and Tory Agents may transfer allegiance from either Party to the other with comparative ease, but not so to the Labour Party. Labour Agents require to build upon, adapt and get the utmost advantage from a far-flung and powerful industrial disposition of forces already existing; a wide preliminary knowledge of the ramifications, character, and tendencies of these allies is necessary. The strategic plan of the Labour Agent embraces not alone a flourishing network of local constituency organisations, but seeks after

vitality all along the line—a healthy Trade Unionism, a virile advanced Movement, an enlightened Co-operative Movement, with vigour and healthiness in all the forms of democratic life in which these forces combine. These things call for specialisation, and afford advantages and opportunities unknown to the Liberal or Tory Organiser. The latter lives in a world of divided and sub-divided geographical limitations, on which he builds a skeleton, wherein, however, no soul dwells, as that which Labour men know and profit by. As far as the idiosyncrasies of the candidate or the exigencies of Party allow, there is an occasional excursion to capture this or that strata or class of voter, and that is mostly all. What have they accomplished?—"The swing of the pendulum," a see-saw of forces, and that is really all. Labour Organisers who realise that Ward and Polling District Organisation is but *incidental to*, but not the *end* of organisation, have in Labour's varied formations a reinforcement to their armour that must eventually prove stronger than the machinery opposed to them. But are there not still some among the orthodox or the ancient in Labour ranks who build laboriously their water-tight compartments, thinking them the last word—the acme—of all organisation? Such men are wrong. One must do all this, and more, for it is the LIFE and VITALITY of the Movement that matters, and that makes the organisation sound and secure for the testing time.

FINANCE OF LOCAL LABOUR PARTIES

No more grave or thorny subject concerning Labour organisation exists than the finance of local Labour Parties. We propose to give an opportunity to our readers to offer practical suggestions as a solution to this problem. Plans of Party re-organisation are not excluded, but proposals capable of immediate adoption, or likely to attain

early favour, are preferable. A prize will be given for the most practical article received by 20th August, consisting of (at the selection of the winner) a copy of either, "The Handbook of Local Government" (bound), or "Wedding's Conduct and Management of Elections." The right is reserved to publish any reply or suggestions received.

OUR SUPPLEMENT

A feature of *The Labour Organiser* will be the publication, in a supplement, of useful forms and ideas capable of illustration, which practical experience has proved to be valuable. Agents are earnestly invited to send any matter of a likely nature they may possess.

1. *Workers' Enquiry Card.* Agents who have compiled a Trade Union Register will have appreciated the practical difficulty that exists in extending to individuals the privilege rightly extended to all members of the Party, by the Constitution, of taking part in their Ward or Polling District business. In the Wolverhampton plan the whole membership is canvassed and Trade Unionists are asked to become "active members." Those assenting are reported upon on the form illustrated and receive invitations to Ward meetings. The system provides useful all-the-year-round-work for the Party, and provides good breaking-in ground for young workers without election experience of canvassing, apart from the value in building up.

2. *The "What-will-I-do" Card.* The card, of course, demonstrates its own usefulness at election times. Results are naturally subject to considerable discount, but the educational value in showing sympathisers in how many ways they may be useful is of great assistance and alone justifies the use of the card.

3. *Ballot Paper.* A smart idea is here illustrated. Advantage is taken of the balloting habit. Some 600 "forms" were obtained by the Lincoln Labour Party in a few weeks by the use of this device. We are informed that this was only a preliminary return as the whole of the results were not in, and in fact the ballot papers had not all been issued.

PRINTING ORDERS— CO-OPERATIVE BUYING

Labour Agents in several districts are at present exploring the possibilities of co-operation in paper supplies and printing orders. The ever-rising prices of printing and other commodities will help to focus attention on this desirable object as a means of reducing cost at election times. In many areas much can be done by wise co-operation not only in purchasing paper and in printing, but in bill-posting also, and sometimes even in bill distribution. There are many directions in which a limited degree of standardisation might be useful. Attention to the effectiveness of printing done has also a very direct bearing on economy. A good and attractive poster or hand-bill has easily twice the "pull" of badly got-up matter. Agents with some printing experience have an advantage in this respect, but there is something to be said for an occasional study of the advert. pages of the best magazines, and for keeping a watchful eye for effectiveness on the hoardings. A printer friend can give one the "points" and enable one to discriminate, and avoid the direction in which needless expense might be incurred. All Agents will find useful a list of paper sizes, weights, descriptions, etc., A most useful diary giving this information and much other helpful matter is published by Messrs. Spicer Brothers, Limited, Paper Makers, 19, New Bridge Street, E.C. 4, and has hitherto been kindly supplied on application when stating occupation.

ASSOCIATION NEWS

The E.C. met at Manchester on 6th July and considered their replies to various points raised by the Employing Associations.

There are now eight regular group meetings of Agents per month arranged in various parts of the country. None can deny the great advantage to the Party that must arise from this new departure. It is hoped to arrange two other groups next month.

It is gratifying to note that every group is applying itself to the task of securing discussions, lectures, or similar study of practical matters arising out of an Agent's employment.

Agents in South-Western and S. Wales area propose to hold their meetings in various centres, some Agents staying over for local practical assistance. Expenses in most areas are now pooled.

London Agents have made an excellent collection of election and organising samples which are being circulated within the area.

In an early supplement we hope to publish the names and addresses of all members of the Association, together with the Group and District Secretaries' names.

A ballot of the Scottish members for the election of an E.C. representative is now proceeding.

It is regrettable to report that three more Agents have notified the relinquishment of the appointments owing to the inability of their Parties to continue their salaries. These cases are since the Scarborough Conference. The E.C. are taking steps to hasten negotiations.

Members are specially requested by the E.C. to note and forward to the General Secretary points arising out of the Registration Courts, and particularly decisions on appeal, or methods of practice or procedure likely to have a general interest.

Members having a private and a business address are requested to notify *both* to the General Secretary, and to intimate which address correspondence should ordinarily be sent to.

DIVIDED BOROUGHS

There is evidence, apart from recent Conference statements that local Party arrangements are not working well in a number of divided boroughs. It is unfortunate for those who are tempted to blame the constitution for every little difficulty that arises, that in some cases it is obviously the departures from the constitution that are giving trouble. But not in all cases, and there is room for an intelligent appreciation of the great variation that exists in local circumstances.

But a clear vision is desirable in approaching this question. There are two traits in local organisation peculiar to divided boroughs, and if one could eliminate from the discussion, or treat

separately, these questions it would be found that few difficulties exist that are not capable of easy handling. A conflict of interest between the divisions of a borough who have selected a candidate and those divisions which have not begins directly an agent is appointed, or real organisation is attempted. And by what word of Solomon can one adjust the rival claims of those who want money and help, when one urges the needs of a candidature and the other the necessities of developments to prepare for one? There is now a change, it must be remembered, in the attitude to selected constituencies. No longer do we coddle a few favoured places, but the Party seeks instead to prepare all for a contest.

The second peculiarity concerns the arguments on which special claims of divisions are advanced. A perennial problem is that of enlarged local claims based on the larger affiliated income derived from some particular division.

Neither of the above difficulties are really concerned with the constitution, or are capable of solution by rule. It is true they might be smothered by organising every division as a separate unit. But this proposal is impracticable from many points of view, and ignores the existence of local politics and official arrangements, to follow which a local front and Party are necessary. Both difficulties revolve themselves after all into financial ones. If there was enough money to go round the friction they occasion would not be heard of. Population for population, the big towns do not yet produce results financially or otherwise proportionate to the smaller places. We shall deal with this aspect again shortly. But if the problem is so largely financial why not attack it in the right way instead of wasting time on abstract discussion of rules and amendments?

But local problems are not everywhere reducible by these two rules. There are places where exceptions to the constitution are desirable, and, in fact, the Party rules provide for same. The difficulty here is almost always the existence of a strong and corporate Trade Unionism and local life centred in some locality and difficult of transference to a common borough centre. These things have been found

adjustable in many places, but local conditions vary so much that circumstances can be readily imagined where the wisest course would be an accommodation and working arrangement on existing terms for a number of years.

On the whole, the dissatisfaction in divided boroughs would seem more capable of handling by sympathetic independent examination of local circumstances on the spot, than by alterations in rule, or by conference discussions.

West Wolverhampton
LOCAL LABOUR PARTY.
WORKERS' ENQUIRY CARD.

..... Ward.

..... Polling District.

I have pleasure in reporting that

Mr.

Address

.....
has consented to become an active worker in the Ward.

Signed..
(person making enquiry).
* * * * *

Card to be returned to Ward Secretary as below.

Mr.

The Labour Party
“WHAT-WILL-I-DO” CARD.

Being a census of our Willing Workers.

I promise to help secure a ringing Labour Victory by :-	.....
Canvassing house-to-house	.....
Canvassing for other Workers	.....
Canvassing friends, work-mates.	.....
Helping at meetings.	.....
Writing in Committee rooms	.....
Acting as cyclist (my bike).	.....
Acting as Fetcher-up.	.....
Showing bills, etc.	.....
Lending Committee Room.	.....
Distributing bills, etc.	.....
Acting as messenger.	.....
Loaning conveyance.	.....

Mark X opposite your promises.

Name

Address

.....
Ward..... Reg. No.....

THANK YOU.

BALLOT PAPER

ARE YOU IN FAVOUR OF CONTRIBUTING 1/- PER QUARTER TO THE FUNDS OF THE LOCAL LABOUR PARTY?

For	Against

Name and Full Address.....